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ABSTRACT

School spending decisions are made locally in California, mostly by the leaders in each school district. In making these decisions, local districts have to comply with the provisions of local collective bargaining contracts with employee unions and with state and federal regulations regarding how some money must be spent. An analysis of school expenditures statewide indicates that, on average, the state's education dollars are being used to support teachers and students. The increase in funds allocated to personnel at all levels was roughly proportional to the total increase in spending. The most dramatic rise in expenditures was for books, supplies, and equipment. This report provides a summary of the most recent data (1997-98) on how K-12 education dollars are spent in California. After several years of recession in the early 1990's, the state's economy was again growing and California was reducing class sizes in K-3 classrooms and increasing its investment in instructional materials. (DFR)

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Clarifying Complex Education Issues

How are California's Education Dollars Spent?

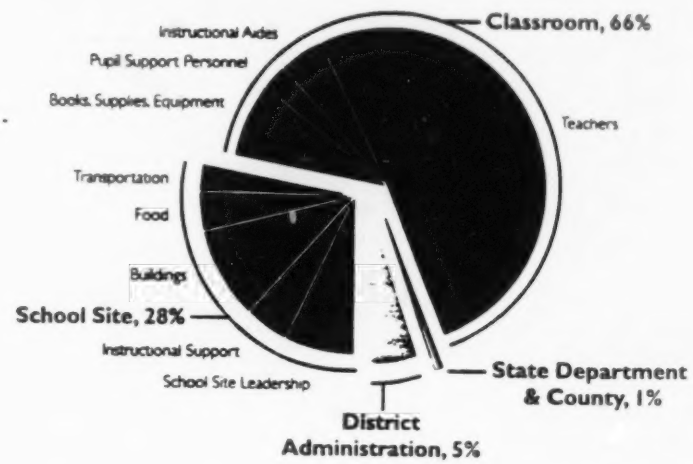
School spending decisions are made locally in California, mostly by the leaders in each school district. In making these decisions, local districts have to comply with the provisions of local collective bargaining contracts with employee unions and with state and federal regulations regarding how some money must be spent.

An analysis of school expenditures statewide indicates that, on average, the state's education dollars are being used to support teachers and students:

- ✔ 94% of education funding (in the hypothetical average school) is spent at the school site for teacher salaries, aides, pupil support, books and supplies, school site administration, buildings, food, and transportation. In most districts, more than half is spent on teacher salaries and health and retirement benefits.
- ✔ 5% of education dollars is spent for district-level administration and support.
- ✔ Of the funds allocated for education, less than 1% goes to County Offices of Education and the California Department of Education (CDE).

The figure here provides a summary of the most recent data (1997–98) on how K–12 education dollars are spent in California. It illustrates expenditures in a hypothetical "average" school in the state. The information came from the official reports made by 994 school districts to the CDE. Individual districts vary in the proportion they spend on each category, and state and county funding does not appear in their budgets.

Figure 1
Most of the State's Spending on Education Goes to Classrooms and School Sites



	Costs	1997–98 Dollars per Student
66%	**Classroom**	$ 3,811
	Classroom teachers	2,954
	Instructional aides	264
	Pupil support (counselors, psychologists, nurses)	151
	Books, supplies, equipment	441
28%	**School Site**	1,614
	School site leadership (principal, vice principal, secretary)	414
	Instructional support (curriculum, library, media, clerical)	263
	Buildings (utilities, maintenance)	547
	Food	231
	Transportation	159
5%	**District Office Administration**	304
1%	**State Department and County**	46
	County oversight	24
	California Department of Education	21
100%	**Total**	$ 5,776

The detail may not add to the total because of rounding.

Data: California Department of Education, "The Average Costs of a California School"

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Adjusted for inflation, education spending has increased 7% since 1990–91

The latest available data on school spending is for the 1997–98 school year. After several years of recession in the early 1990s, the state's economy was again growing and California was reducing class sizes in K–3 classrooms and increasing its investment in instructional materials. In inflation-adjusted dollars, spending per student went up a total of 7% during that time.*

The figures here compare spending in a hypothetical "average" school in 1997–98 to expenditures in 1990–91.

Since these numbers are statewide averages, the pattern in individual school districts can be similar or somewhat different. The differences depend on the district's own circumstances, the priorities of the governing board, and contracts with employees.

* Dollars are adjusted by the Implicit Price Deflator for State and Local Government Purchases of Goods and Services. This is the inflation factor used to adjust school district revenue limits and some categorical funding.

The increase in funds allocated to personnel at all levels was roughly proportional to the total increase in spending. The most dramatic rise in expenditures was for books, supplies, and equipment. The bulk of this change came after 1994–95.

CLASSROOM

- Classroom teachers — 8%
- Instructional aides — 7%
- Books, supplies, equipment — 47%

SCHOOL SITE

- Food expense — 13%
- School site leadership (principals and vice principals) — 5%
- Instructional support (curriculum, library, media materials) — 6%

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION

- (superintendents, assistants, classified administration, secretaries) — 6%

At the same time, certain expenditure areas have seen a decline, to a great degree still reflecting cuts that were made during the recession in the early 1990s. Of particular note is the reduction in per pupil expenditures for pupil support personnel, which is consistent with California's high student-to-staff ratios in this area.

CLASSROOM

- **Pupil support personnel** (guidance counselors, psychologists, school nurses) — -4%

SCHOOL SITE

- **Transportation costs** (buses, drivers, mechanics, etc.) — -13%
- **Building expenditures** (utilities, maintenance personnel, repairs, materials) — -7%

STATE DEPARTMENT AND COUNTY — -11%

Data: California Department of Education, "The Average Costs of a California School"

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